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## Dick Smith VZ200

At just under \$200, Dickie's come up with another winner here. The VZ200 is a neat little computer indeed.

The VZ-200 is virtually a totally non-technical machine for the user who wants a gentle introduction to BASIC programming and home computing. For example, nowhere in the manual does it say what kind of processor is under the hood! Indeed, there is virtually no technical detail at all anywhere in the manual.

All this is possibly to the benefit of the completely non-technical novice who could do without that kind of intimidation. But it bodes ill for the future availability of professionally written games and utility software. I'd say that for the near future at least, and excluding whatever Dick Smith may release, the VZ200 will remain a BASIC-only machine.

The VZ200 is probably based on the ubiquitous Z-80, and is supplied with 8 Kbytes of RAM as standard. A 16 Kbyte memory expansion module is available for \$79.

The BASIC interpreter used is, of course, Microsoft's Extended BASIC, complete with colour graphics and sound commands. The screen displays 16 lines of 32 characters each, and the keyboard is a calculator-style QWERTY with a soft action. Like most of the machines covered, the spacing between keys was less than I would have liked; obviously they are designed for somewhat smaller fingers than mine.

Two graphics modes are available: in mode 0, the graphics resolution is 64 by 32 pixels with nine colours available and text displayable. In mode 1, the resolution is 128 by 64 pixels in eight colours, and this is a better mode for games and more complex graphics.

The graphics statements are the standard kind used in the TRS-80 Colour Computer and other machines with Microsoft Colour BASIC. A point is set with the statement SET (X,Y) and turned off with the RESET (X,Y) statement. POINT(X,Y) will return true if a point has been set and false if it has not. The colour is set using the COLOR statement, which sets the foreground and background colours.

The background can be either green or orange in mode 0, while in mode 1 only four colours can be selected for each background colour.

The SOUND X,Y statement will generate a tone of pitch X and duration Y. By using data statements, it is possible to create quite complex little tunes.

For those who want to dabble in some PEEKing and POKing, the manual does give the addresses of the screen RAM, so some fast updating can be done that way, though this will require some experimenting.

The manual is well written, and is organised as a tutorial text, bearing in mind the likely audience for this kind of machine. There are no signs of the Janglish that usually mars manuals on this kind of machine.

Expansion is limited on the VZ-200;

there is a socket on the back for the plug-in 16K RAM module, and a peripheral connector, obviously intended for a printer. Apart from the cassette cables, that's it. For parents who don't want their kids to get carried away buying more and more extras, that's probably a blessing!

While this computer probably won't do much for the dedicated enthusiast who wants to get into machine code programming and interfacing all kinds of peripherals, it's just right for those who want to learn some programming and not get bogged down in unnecessary details. Run a business it won't; draw you in to the joys of programming it will!

